

Message Text

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ACTION INT-05

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
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FM AMCONSUL LUBUMBASHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2615
AMEMBASSY KINSHASA IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

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DEPARTMENT PASS BUREAU OF MINES (INTERIOR) FOR COLBY

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: CG, EMIN
SUBJECT: ZAIRIAN MINERAL PRODUCTION: SWEETWOOD/ELLIS VIST TO KOLWEZI

1. ELLIS (BUMINES, WASHINGTON GEOLOGIST), AND SWEETWOOD, REGIONAL RESOURCES OFFICER, (CONGEN JOHANNESBURG, MINING ENGINEER) VISITED KOLWEZI AUGUST 21-23, 1978 TO EXAMINE SITUATION IN THE GECAMINES MINES THERE FIRST-HAND. THEIR SPECIAL FOCUS WAS ON FUTURE RELIABILITY OF THESE MINES AS AN INDIRECT SUPPLIER OF COBALT TO THE U.S. SINCE IN ZAIRE COBALT IS PRODUCED AS A BY-PRODUCT OF COPPER PRODUCTION, THE FUTURE OF COPPER PRODUCTION IN ZAIRE WAS ALSO EXTENSIVELY EXPLORED. PARTICULARLY INTERESTING DISCUSSIONS WERE HELD ON THE SUBJECTS OF (A) THE AVAILABILITY OF SPARE PARTS, (B) PRESENT AND FUTURE NEEDS FOR EXPATRIATE PERSONNEL AND, (C) THE PRESENT STATE OF THE PLANT. THIS CABLE CONTAINS
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PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE VISIT. FULLER SUPPLEMENTARY REPORTS WILL BE SUBMITTED.

2. TEAM VISITED FOUR OPEN-PIT MINES, THE UNDERGROUND MINE, THE TWO CONCENTRATORS AND THE COPPER/COBALT RE-FINERY. WORK RESEMBLES PRE-MAY LEVELS AND GENERAL ACTIVITY SEEMS APPROXIMATELY SAME AS IN 1977.

3. IN THE MINES, EQUIPMENT ROSTERS APPEAR TO BE OPERATING AT NEARLY FULL STRENGTH. REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE, HOWEVER, APPEAR TO BE LAGGING AND GENERAL CONDITION OF EQUIPMENT PROMISES DIFFICULTIES. TWO KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES CLAIM THAT THERE IS NO NEW MINING EQUIPMENT CURRENTLY ON ORDER. SPARE PARTS SITUATION SEEMS ADEQUATE FOR THE SHORT RUN. GENERAL PLAN FOR 1978 CALLS FOR THE MINING IN THE KOLWEZI AREA OF NINE MILLION METRIC TONS OF ORE AT AVERAGE GRADE OF SIX POINT ZERO PERCENT COPPER AND ZERO POINT SEVEN TO ONE POINT ZERO PERCENT COBALT.

4. IN THE CONCENTRATORS, SITUATION APPEARS GOOD. THE OLDER CONCENTRATOR (1941) SHOWS SERIOUS SIGNS OF DETERIORATION AND REQUIRES A SUBSTANTIAL LEVEL OF MAINTENANCE IN ORDER TO CONTINUE CURRENT LEVEL OF PRODUCTION. THE NEW CONCENTRATOR (1968), ON THE OTHER HAND, IS OPERATING WITH MINIMUM PROBLEMS AND TEAM EXPECTS NONE IN THE SHORT TERM.

5. IN THE REFINERY, PRODUCTION APPEARS TO BE AT FULL PRE-MAY LEVELS ALTHOUGH TEAM FEELS MAINTENANCE IS QUESTIONABLE. TOP GECAMINES MANAGEMENT CURRENTLY BELIEVES THAT 1978 PRODUCTION OF COBALT BY THE KOLWEZI AND THE OTHER GECAMINES REFINERIES WILL BE TWELVE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THOUSAND METRIC TONS. IN 1977, PRODUCTION WAS ELEVEN THOUSAND, FIVE HUNDRED METRIC TONS. TEAM HAS NO REASON TO DOUBT THE PLANNED 1978 FIGURE. PRODUCTION IS CURRENTLY BEING PACKED IN ONE-TON DRUMS AND DISPATCHED VIA RAIL/RIVER (VOIE NATIONALE).

6. THE ABSENCE OF EXPATRIATE PERSONNEL IN THE MINES, THE CONCENTRATORS AND THE REFINERY HAS CREATED A DEFINITE SHORTFALL IN THE DEPTH OF TECHNICAL EXPERTISE. GECAMINES KOLWEZI MANAGEMENT BELIEVES THAT IT HAS QUALIFIED ZAIRIAN PERSONNEL TO PERFORM EVERY TASK BUT THAT THERE ARE TOO FEW OF THEM FOR MANAGEMENT TO BE CONFIDENT THEY CAN MEET ALL NEEDS. GECAMINES KOLWEZI MANAGER CONSIDERS THAT AN ADDITIONAL NINETY TECHNICAL PERSONNEL (ENGINEERS, MASTER MECHANICS AND TECHNICIANS) WOULD PROVIDE HIM THE NECESSARY DEPTH FOR THE SHORT RUN. SOME WOULD ALSO BE EXPECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAM OF INCREASING NUMBER OF ZAIRIANS TRAINED TO PERFORM THESE FUNCTIONS. GECAMINES LUBUMBASHI MANAGEMENT PRESENTLY PLANS TO EMPLOY SUBSTANTIALLY FEWER.

7. THE GREAT SHORTAGE OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE HAS ALSO CREATED PROBLEMS AT KOLWEZI. OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, ACCORDING TO GECAMINES-KOLWEZI, THEY HAVE RECEIVED LESS THAN HALF OF THEIR FOREIGN EXCHANGE NEEDS, AND EXPENDABLES AND SPARE PARTS HAVE QUICKLY GOBBLED UP THAT SHORT RATION.

8. TEAM FOUND GECAMINES EXPATRIATE AND ZAIRIAN STAFF CANDID AND FORTHCOMING AND BELIEVES THAT NO EFFORT WAS MADE TO HIDE DATA.

9. TEAM CONCLUDES THAT, DESPITE GECAMINES/KOLWEZI'S PROBLEMS OF AGING EQUIPMENT, THIN COVER OF TECHNICAL AND SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL NEEDS, AND FOREIGN EXCHANGE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONSTRICTIONS, U.S. END-USERS CAN REMAIN REASONABLY CERTAIN FOR THE REMAINDER OF 1978 AND FOR THE NEAR FUTURE YEARS THAT KOLWEZI WILL CONTINUE TO PRODUCE COBALT AT LEVELS CLOSE TO THOSE OF RECENT YEARS, FAILING, OF COURSE, A LASTING POLITICAL CATAclysm IN SHABA.
SIMPSON

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